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ABSTRACT

The magnet school program established during the 1988-89 school year by the New York City Board of Education in four high schools is evaluated in this summary report. Magnet schools were developed to achieve an integrated school system, with a focus on development of a curriculum that would attract various racial and ethnic groups. Increased student motivation was expected to contribute to achievement of the following program objectives: improved attendance; increased academic achievement; improved intergroup student relations; and increased positive school attitudes. Data collection involved analysis of aggregated attendance and grade advancement data and a survey of students in the program. Findings indicate that all four high schools attained or came close to attaining two of the three objectives. The attendance objective was met by each of the four schools, and the achievement objective was met and exceeded by three of the four schools. Survey responses demonstrate that although over one-half of the students displayed generally favorable attitudes toward their peers and school, the evaluation criterion of 70 percent was not achieved in any of the four schools. The recommendation is made for continuous emphasis on improving the attitudinal objective. Programs of the participating schools are described. (LMI)

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OREA Report

EVALUATION SECTION REPORT

MAGNET SCHOOL PROGRAM
1988-1989

END-OF-YEAR-REPORT

EA 022 163

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John E. Schoener, Chief Administrator

December, 1989

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1988-1989

END-OF-YEAR-REPORT

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SUMMARY

The New York City Board of Education instituted Magnet School programs in four high schools during the 1988-89 school year. The programs at these schools offered innovative curricula not usually available to secondary students in their zoned high schools. The participating high schools were: Central Park East Secondary School, The High School for the Humanities, John Dewey High School, and Townsend Harris High School.

PURPOSE

Magnet schools were developed by the Board of Education, in part, to help achieve a desegregated school system. Thus curricula were designed to attract students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds to study in settings where they could share common academic interests. At three of the participating schools emphasis was on giving students a solid background in the humanities.

PROGRAM GOALS

Magnet programs' goals were to provide a school environment where students from the city's various ethnic neighborhoods would have increased achievement motivation. Administrators hoped that students given the opportunity to participate in these programs would enhance their motivation and that, in turn, would lead to improved attendance, high achievement, better relations among different racial and ethnic groups, and positive attitudes toward the Magnet Program.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

All four schools met the attendance objective. Three of the four exceeded the achievement objective, and the fourth school came close to meeting that objective as well. Students' responses to survey items about their schools and their peers indicate that while one-half of the students display generally favorable attitudes toward their peers and their school, the evaluation criterion of 70 percent was not met by students in any of the four schools.

The following recommendation is made based on the evaluation findings:

- The attitudinal objective should be emphasized throughout the school year. This would be a way to help students improve their attitudes toward their school and their peers.

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I. INTRODUCTION

PROGRAM BACKGROUND

The New York City Board of Education, through its Division of High Schools (D.H.S.), instituted magnet educational programs offering innovative curricula not usually available to secondary students in their zoned high schools. Administrators hoped the special programs would attract students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds to study together on the basis of common academic interests. D.H.S. also believed that a setting of this kind would foster the development of cooperative intergroup relations among students..

The participating schools were: Central Park East Secondary School, High School for the Humanities, John Dewey High School, and Townsend Harris High School at Queens College.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

Magnet programs offer curricula designed to attract students from the city's various ethnic neighborhoods. Administrators hoped that the opportunity to participate in these programs would enhance students' motivation which, in turn, would lead to improved attendance and achievement, and better relations among different racial and ethnic groups.

Accordingly, the program's stated objectives were:

- Student participation in the Magnet School Program will result in positive attitudes towards the magnet program and their peers on the part of 70 percent of a sample of students in the program.

- Increased student motivation will result in significantly better attendance on the part of students attending target magnet schools as compared to the attendance of students in the area superintendency as a whole.

- At least 70 percent of students attending target schools will demonstrate academic achievement by being promoted to the next grade.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

To assess the program's objectives, the Office of Research, Evaluation, and Assessment (OREA) collected and analyzed data from both the program participants and the school.

Specifically, OREA analyzed aggregate attendance data prepared by the Division of High School's Office of Data Acquisition, Tabulation, and Analysis (DATA); obtained information regarding the percentage of students who were promoted to the next grade from each of the participating schools; and analyzed survey data provided by students in the program.

The standardized student questionnaire used was the Student Opinion Inventory Part A developed by the National Study of School Evaluation. The instrument elicited information regarding the respondents' attitudes toward the school environment on 38 items which were grouped according to the following subscales: student participation, student-teacher interaction, student-counselor interaction, student curriculum and instruction, and student school image. The students decided the extent to which they agreed with each of the 38 statements on a scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree."

SCOPE OF THIS REPORT

The second chapter of this report provides a brief overview of the program at each school. The third chapter analyzes students' attendance patterns and academic performance (as measured by the percentage of students in the program promoted to the next grade), and presents descriptive data on students' attitudes toward the Magnet School Program and their peers. Conclusions and recommendations are presented in the fourth chapter.

II. PROGRAM DESCRIPTIONS

Chapter 53 partially funded operating costs of four New York City high schools: Central Park East Secondary School, High School for the Humanities, John Dewey High School, and Townsend Harris High School at Queens College. These schools attracted a broad spectrum of students and achieved a favorable racial/ethnic balance because of their high quality-programs and innovative school designs.

CENTRAL PARK EAST SECONDARY SCHOOL--COALITION OF ESSENTIAL SCHOOLS

Central Park East Secondary School (C.P.E.S.S.) is an alternative school that is a cooperative project of the Community School District 4, the New York City Board of Education, and the Coalition of Essential Schools (a national organization of 12 public and private schools). C.P.E.S.S. builds on the experience of the Central Park East Elementary School over the past 12 years.

The school concentrates on the following principles developed by the Coalition of Essential Schools: learning a few things well rather than many things superficially; personalized teaching and learning (no teacher advises more than 15 students or teaches more than 80 students); setting high standards for all students; and encouraging students to learn by doing rather than by memorizing facts and figures.

All students at C.P.E.S.S. take a common core of courses consisting of a mathematics/science component for half the school day, and a humanistic component (art, history, social studies, and literature) for the other half. All staff teach writing and public speaking in all subjects. The maximum class size is 18 students, allowing teachers to design individualized learning programs that meet the diverse needs and interests of students.

HIGH SCHOOL FOR THE HUMANITIES--INTERDISCIPLINARY PROGRAMS

The High School for the Humanities was designed to attract students in interdisciplinary studies with a focus on the humanities. The school offers courses on history, philosophy, languages, literature, and aspects of the social sciences that incorporate a historical approach. Students have the opportunity to interact with the city's cultural and business communities through independent study, research, and internships.

The school's interdisciplinary focus incorporates social studies and communication arts as well as fine arts and performing arts. Additional course work in mathematics, science and physical education are offered. A vocational career center is also available allowing students to explore careers relevant to their academic interests.

JOHN DEWEY HIGH SCHOOL--EXPERIMENTAL SCHOOL WITH EXTENDED DAY AND FOUR-CYCLE YEAR

John Dewey--an experimental high school--features an eight-hour instructional day from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. for all

students. Besides a complete program of classroom instruction, students are engaged in a variety of vocational activities such as internship and independent studies. The school year is divided into four cycles instead of the traditional two-semester year, as this structure encourages the use of theme-based approaches.

The wide range of available program clusters includes: ecology; fashion industry and design; health and human services; law; management and finance; performing arts; fine and commercial arts; transportation, tourism, and hotels; mathematics/science research; humanities; and business. Following the philosophy of John Dewey, a non-numerical grading system is used for all courses.

TOWNSEND HARRIS HIGH SCHOOL--LIBERAL ARTS HUMANITIES

Townsend Harris High School was re-established in 1984 to attract motivated students interested in a rigorous course of study. Planning and designing aspects of the school's educational programs with Queens College faculty and administrators have permitted the development of a strong focus on the humanities: literature, history, the fine arts, and foreign languages.

One of the school's requirements is that all students take three years of study of a modern language as well as two years of a classical one. Courses in science and mathematics complement the focus on the humanities and permit students to accomplish distributional requirements.

The students in all four schools learn word processing and other computer skills, and they also participate in summer career

internships designed to develop a sense of civic responsibility and to provide experience in a professional work environment.

III. OUTCOMES

ATTENDANCE

The attendance objective stated that increased motivation on the part of the students in the magnet program would result in an average attendance higher than that of students in the area of superintendency as a whole. The figures shown in Table 1, which include students classified as long-term absentees (L.T.A.s), indicate that this objective was met in all four schools.

The average attendance of students at John Dewey (91 percent) and Townsend Harris (95 percent) high schools, exceeded that their superintendencies by 7 and 11 percentage points respectively. Students' attendance at Central Park East averaged 90 percent, surpassing the average for similar students in Special Programs by 30 percent. The average percentage attendance at the High School for the Humanities was the same as (81 percent) that of the Manhattan superintendency (81 percent).

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

The second objective stated that at least 70 percent of students attending target magnet schools would demonstrate academic achievement by being promoted to the next grade. Accordingly OREA obtained data from each school on the percentage of students promoted to the next grade. These data are summarized in Table 2. As shown in this table, only one of the schools, High School for the Humanities, failed to meet this objective while students at John Dewey, Townsend Harris and Central Park East surpassed the objective with 81, 100 and 100 percent promotion rates respectively.

Table 1

Aggregate Percentage Attendance of Students in Magnet Schools and Attendance Patterns of Students in their Superintendency

School	Average Attendance Percent Sept.-May[a]	Difference in Average Percentage Attendance
John Dewey	91	7
Brooklyn Superintendency	84	
Townsend Harris	95	11
Queens Superintendency	84	
Central Park East	90	30
Special Programs[b]	60	
H.S. School for the Humanities	81	0
Manhattan Superintendency	81	

[a] Attendance data are supplied by the Office of Data Acquisition, Tabulation, and Analysis.

[b] The Division of High Schools classifies Central Park East as one of its 15 Special Programs. Others include the Pregnant Teenagers Project, Project Outreach, and the Library Centers.

- The attendance objective was met in all four schools.

Table 2

Promotion Rates in the Magnet School Program during the 1988-89 School Year

Grade	Percentage Promoted			
	John Dewey	Townsend Harris	Central Park	H.S. Humanities
Ninth	72	99	100	34
Tenth	81	100	100	53
Eleventh	76	100	[a]	71
Twelfth	93	99	---	95
Total	81	100	100	63

[a] There were no eleventh or twelfth graders in this school.

- Students in three schools out of the four schools surpassed the promotion objective.

STUDENT ATTITUDES

The third objective of the 1988-89 Magnet Schools Program was to provide a social environment where students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds would not only study together on the basis of common academic interests, but would develop better cooperative intergroup relations. The attitudinal objective was that 70 percent of the students participating in the program would have positive attitudes toward the magnet program and their peers.

OREA assessed this objective using the Student Opinion Inventory Part A developed by the National Study of School of Evaluation. This instrument contains 38 items grouped in six subscales regarding the school environment. Students are asked to decide the extent to which they agree with each statement on a scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." According to the National Study of School Evaluation, the interpretation of a score based on a subscale (homogeneous group of items) is generally more reliable than one based on a single item.

Consequently, OREA focused its interpretation on the students' responses to six subscales: student participation; student-teacher interaction; student-counselor interaction; student-administration interaction; student curriculum and instruction; and student school image. The responses for each subscale are presented in Table 3.

These figures indicate that only 50 percent of the students

Table 3

Summary of Magnet School Program Students' Responses to Survey Items about their School and their Peers

Items subscales	Subscale Percentage Scores				
	John Dewey	Townsend Harris	Central Park East	H.S. Humanities	Overall
Student-participation	60	55	54	41	53
Student-teacher interaction	63	54	67	44	57
Student-counselor interaction	55	50	63	35	51
Student-administration interaction	51	32	44	34	40
Student-curriculum and instruction	59	57	54	40	53
Student-school image	61	56	59	36	53

- Although approximately one-half of the students responding to the survey had favorable attitudes toward their peers and the school environment, the evaluation criterion of 70 percent was not met in any of the schools.

had generally favorable attitudes toward their peers, the overall friendliness of the student body at their schools, and the school environment.

In summary, these responses indicate that while one-half of the students responding to the survey had favorable attitudes toward their peers and toward the school environment, the evaluation criterion of 70 percent was not met in any of the schools participating in the program.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The 1988-89 Magnet School Program attained two of its three evaluation objectives, although there was some unevenness with respect to how well certain schools performed on individual objectives. The attendance objective was met in all four schools; similarly the achievement objective was met and exceeded by three of the four magnet schools.

Student responses to survey items indicate that while one-half of the students displayed generally favorable attitudes toward their peers and their school, the evaluation criterion of 70 percent was not met.

The following recommendation is made based on the evaluation findings:

- The attitudinal component of the program should be emphasized throughout the school year as a means of helping students improve their attitudes toward their school and their peers.